The American Legion and Habitat For Humanity Volunteer involvement toolkit

Give back to service members and veterans. Invest in Habitat. Help build your community.
Working together to make a difference
The American Legion was founded in 1919 on the preamble for God and Country. One of the four pillars of The American Legion is Taking Care of Veterans. Part of that commitment as a Legionnaire is the giving of our time, energy and talents as a volunteer. Over 6,000 volunteers currently serve as active American Legion volunteers in their communities with the Department of Veterans Affairs Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program.

During the Ninety-First National Convention of The American Legion, The Veterans Affairs and Rehabilitation Convention Committee approved Resolution 106, The American Legion Support Habitat for Humanity Volunteer Opportunities.

The American Legion has sought to expand the scope of the organization’s volunteer programs beyond the traditional role and volunteer assignments of the VA Voluntary Service (VAVS) Program. Habitat for Humanity shares a common vision in providing assistance by providing simple, decent shelter to those in need. Habitat for Humanity and The American Legion have agreed to support each other’s work by providing volunteer opportunities for Legionnaires and helping ensure qualifying veterans and service members know the process to apply for a Habitat for Humanity home.

Habitat for Humanity is an ecumenical Christian housing ministry founded in 1976 to eliminate poverty housing from the face of the earth and make decent shelter a matter of conscience and action. Through volunteer labor and donations of money and materials, Habitat builds and rehabilitates simple, decent houses alongside homeowner (partner) families. Habitat for Humanity offers no-profit loans to its partner families, including service members and veterans that have a need for housing, in local communities throughout the United States and in nearly 90 countries around the world. Partner families repay these loans through mortgage payments which are in turn used to build more houses with other families.

The American Legion is uniquely aligned, through our 14,000 posts, to provide volunteer support and encourage those service members or veterans that qualify for houses to apply to be Habitat for Humanity homeowners. Nationwide, there are service members, veterans and their families that may qualify to partner with Habitat for Humanity to help them become homeowners. Due to financial circumstances or the economy, many of these service members or veterans contact The American Legion for assistance. This is an opportunity for The American Legion to demonstrate its commitment to serving those who serve and helping their community.

Volunteer opportunities toolkit
This toolkit is designed to educate Legionnaires about opportunities to support Habitat’s work. You will find:

- About Habitat for Humanity.
- Opportunities to get involved with Habitat for Humanity, including ideas geared specifically toward Legionnaires. You’ll find information about how Legionnaires can:
  - Change your community: Local building, other ways to volunteer and ReStores.
  - Offer a hand up: Assist with service member or veteran eligibility referrals.
  - Travel with Habitat: Global Village, Carter Work Project and RV Care-A-Vanners.
  - Involve youth: Act! Speak! Build! Week, Youth United, and Parent and Teacher Resources.
  - Engage your campus: Collegiate Challenge and Campus Chapters.
  - Commit long term: AmeriCorps and International Volunteer Program.
  - Advocate: Expand your impact.
  - Donate: Build hope.

Thank you
The American Legion and Habitat for Humanity are grateful for your service to the military and the betterment of our nation. We hope you will continue to offer your time, skills and compassion. Thank you!
About Habitat for Humanity

What is Habitat for Humanity International?
Habitat for Humanity International is an ecumenical Christian ministry that welcomes to its work all people dedicated to the cause of eliminating poverty housing. Since its founding in 1976, Habitat has built more than 350,000 houses worldwide, providing simple, decent and affordable shelter for more than 1.75 million people. For more information, visit www.habitat.org.

Who can work with Habitat?
Habitat for Humanity invites people of all backgrounds, races and religions to build houses together in partnership with families in need.

How does it work?
Through volunteer labor and donations of money and materials, Habitat builds and rehabilitates simple, decent houses alongside our homeowner (partner) families.

Habitat is not a giveaway program. In addition to a down payment and monthly mortgage payments, homeowners invest hundreds of hours of their own labor (sweat equity) into building their Habitat house and the houses of others. The homeowners’ monthly mortgage payments are used to build still more Habitat houses.

Does Habitat only build new homes?
Habitat is committed to helping build communities! Habitat for Humanity does both new construction and renovation of existing homes.

How are partner families selected?
Families in need of decent shelter apply to local Habitat affiliates. The affiliate’s family selection committee chooses homeowners based on their level of need, their willingness to become partners in the program and their ability to repay the loan. Every affiliate follows a nondiscriminatory policy of family selection.
What are Habitat affiliates?
Habitat for Humanity affiliates are the community-level Habitat for Humanity offices. Each affiliate is an independently run, nonprofit organization that coordinates all aspects of Habitat home building in its local area, including: fundraising; building site selection; partner family selection and support; house construction; and mortgage servicing.

Where does Habitat for Humanity operate?
Habitat works worldwide, including more than 90 countries and in all 50 states of the United States, the District of Columbia, Guam, the U.S. Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico.

How are donations distributed and used?
Donations, whether to a local Habitat affiliate or to Habitat for Humanity International, are used as designated by the donor. Gifts received by HFHI that are designated to a specific affiliate or building project are forwarded to that affiliate or project. Undesignated gifts are used where most needed and for administrative expenses.

Who controls and manages Habitat for Humanity International?
An ecumenical, international board of directors determines policy and oversees and guides the mission of Habitat for Humanity International. Board members are dedicated volunteers who are deeply concerned about the problems of poverty housing around the world. The HFHI headquarters office operates with an administrative staff, assisted by a core group of professional and support employees and supplemented by volunteers. Each local Habitat affiliate is managed by its own local volunteer board.

How does Habitat work with the government?
Habitat for Humanity’s Government Relations and Advocacy team works with legislators and housing regulators to increase support for affordable homeownership and eliminate poverty housing. Habitat monitors public policies related to housing, community and international development and advocates for policy choices that increase access to decent, affordable housing for people around the world.

Affiliates accept government funds for infrastructure, utilities, capacity building or training, and house building. Habitat accepts these funds so long as they have no conditions that would violate Habitat’s principles or limit its ability to proclaim its Christian identity.

How can I learn more?
Visit www.habitat.org.
Opportunities to get involved

This joint American Legion and Habitat for Humanity volunteer toolkit will identify opportunities for American Legion Department, Districts and Posts to assist Habitat for Humanity in building or supporting military or veterans’ housing projects and all of Habitat for Humanity’s efforts to provide simple, decent, affordable housing.

These opportunities broken down into various types of involvement opportunities:

- **Change your community:** Local building, ReStores and volunteering beyond the build site.
- **Offer a hand up:** Assist with service member or veteran eligibility referrals.
- **Travel with Habitat:** Global Village, Carter Work Project and RV Care-A-Vanners.
- **Involve youth:** Act! Speak! Build! Week, Youth United, and Parent and Teacher Resources.
- **Engage your campus:** Collegiate Challenge and Campus Chapters.
- **Commit long term:** AmeriCorps and International Volunteer Program.
- **Advocate:** Expand your impact.
- **Donate:** Build hope.

Further questions can be directed to Habitat for Humanity International at 1-800-HABITAT (422-4828) or publicinfo@habitat.org.

One of the most effective avenues for involvement is your local affiliate. Habitat for Humanity affiliates are independently incorporated, community-level Habitat for Humanity offices. Each affiliate coordinates all aspects of Habitat home building in its local area, including: fundraising; building site selection; partner family selection and support; house construction; and mortgage servicing.

Whether you work in the office, renovate homes through the A Brush with Kindness program, participate in a Women Build, or help in a ReStore, you can help your local affiliate transform your community. Find your local Habitat organization at www.habitat.org/local.

**Learn about your affiliate**

Be sure to ask your local affiliate if they currently sponsor service member or veteran programs in which you can participate. If their activities do not fit with your schedule, let them know about activities you will be doing with Habitat outside your community.

Some questions you can ask in order to determine how to support Habitat locally include:

- What geographic area does your affiliate cover?
- Generally, how many homes does your affiliate build per year?
- How does your affiliate involve service members or veterans in its mission? You might also want to ask your affiliate if they participate in specific programs including service members or veterans, which are described below.
- Is your affiliate currently in need of construction volunteers?
- Besides construction, in what other way can I volunteer with the affiliate?
- After reviewing the toolkit, you might have specific questions about activities that you would like to do in conjunction with service members or veterans.
Understand The American Legion and local Habitat affiliate relationship
Habitat for Humanity’s headquarters has made information about The American Legion partnership available to Habitat affiliates. Due to affiliates’ diversity in staffing, it is up to each affiliate’s staff to determine capacity to support your activities. Even if you are not working directly with your local affiliate, they may be interested to hear about your efforts.

Build with service member or veterans groups
This is one way to partner with a local affiliate and actually help build service member or veteran homes on a local worksite. Building with a group of service members or veterans can be energizing and inspiring. Most HFHI affiliates host build days on Saturday. Building with Habitat has become a popular volunteering opportunity; some affiliates are able to involve volunteers right away while others might have to add you to their volunteer waiting list.

Visit a Habitat ReStore
Habitat ReStores are outlets that accept donated goods—large home improvement goods—for resale. The money helps local affiliates fund the construction of Habitat homes within their communities. Visit http://www.habitat.org/env/restores.aspx to find out if there is a ReStore where you can donate, shop and volunteer in your area!

Join the board or a committee
Service members and veterans are encouraged to talk to their local affiliate about becoming a board or committee member. Involvement on the affiliate’s board of directors today will prepare service members or veterans for future roles in the leadership of the organization, and the insight, ideas and enthusiasm of service member or veteran board members can be valuable assets to a board.

Support A Brush with Kindness projects
Habitat for Humanity’s A Brush with Kindness is a locally-operated program serving low-income homeowners who struggle to maintain the exterior of their homes. The program is a holistic approach to providing affordable housing and assisting communities as well as families.

Through the ABWK program, groups of volunteers help homeowners with exterior maintenance. This typically includes painting, minor exterior repairs, landscaping, weatherization and exterior clean-up. Habitat selects partner families based on income, need and willingness to partner. In addition to volunteers, Habitat uses donated materials and takes no profit for their services. Payments made by the homeowners are placed in a revolving fund to help A Brush with Kindness serve others in need.

A Brush with Kindness ensures that families live in safe and well-maintained homes. The program is designed to revitalize the appearance of the neighborhood, encourage connections within the community, and most importantly, help preserve affordable housing stock. Ask your local affiliate if your affiliate is doing A Brush with Kindness projects and how you can help revitalize communities in your area!

Sponsor a home
Your post, church, school or other local organization can sponsor a home, or part of a home, in your community. Contact your local affiliate to learn more about financial needs and sponsorship opportunities.

Organize an office Habitat day for team building
Does your office team need a change of pace? Your local affiliate could be the perfect place. Ask your local affiliate if they have a program geared towards office team building or if they would like to try it with your group. Some companies send the entire office to the Habitat build site as a way to build relationships and boost morale. Please remember, a donation to the Habitat for Humanity affiliate is a part of this activity and some affiliates may not have the capacity for such an event.

There are a number of different ways to do a Habitat team building day. A typical day might include the following:
- Information session on how Habitat works.
- Safety briefing.
- Construction work such as moving dirt or framing walls.
- Lunch with a homeowner family.
- Fun team building activity involving problem solving.
- Touring a Habitat neighborhood.

Deliver lunch to the site
Some affiliates have such high demand for volunteer opportunities that the best way to get on the build site is to deliver a meal. Contact your local affiliate and ask if they would like a lunch catered for volunteers on the work site.

You may want to find out when the next group of service member or veterans groups will be on the site. Helping provide volunteers with a positive experience is key to Habitat’s success!
Offer a hand up:
Assist with service member or veteran eligibility referrals

The affiliate’s family selection committee chooses homeowners based on their level of need, their willingness to become partners in the program and their ability to repay the loan.

Inform service members and veterans in need
The American Legion, through the Department (State) Service Officers, can distribute Habitat for Humanity’s eligibility criterion throughout states looking for veterans that may qualify for the housing program. Families in need of decent shelter apply to local Habitat affiliates. Affiliates follow a nondiscriminatory policy of family selection.

Potential partner families should fill out an application with their local Habitat for Humanity affiliate. Find contact information at www.habitat.org/local. Many affiliates have homeowner criteria and an application on their Web site.

Encourage your local affiliate to connect with veterans
If a local affiliate inquires about assistance in locating Service Members or Veterans eligible for a Habitat for Humanity home to be built, please have them contact The American Legion Department (State) Service Officer for the respective state. A national listing of Department Service Officers can be found at http://www.legion.org/members/locators/dsodirectory.

Additionally, The American Legion can help provide volunteers for veterans’ housing project sites as needed.

Travel with Habitat.

You can make an impact as you see the world.

Build a Global Village
Become a part of Habitat’s worldwide mission through the Global Village short-term build trips. Travel to new destinations, explore a different culture, learn more about the burden of poverty housing, and work alongside partner families and local volunteers to create decent, affordable housing.

Legionnaires may want to participate by:

- Applying as an individual. See the schedule of trips at http://www.habitat.org/cd/gv/schedule.aspx.

- Traveling with friends or family. Participants must be 16 years of age; minors traveling internationally must be accompanied by a participant or guardians.

- Organizing a trip with your post, church, school or other organization.

- Giving a trip to an employee, customer or local Legionnaire as a reward or prize.

- Sponsoring a service member or veteran who is going on a Global Village trip.

Visit www.habitat.org/gv to learn more.
Be a part of the Jimmy & Rosalynn Carter Work Project
Join Habitat’s most famous volunteer for a week of building and awareness-raising. The annual build alternates between domestic and global projects. Visit www.habitat.org/cwp to learn more.

Get on the road with RV Care-A-Vanners
Combine the fun of recreational vehicle travel with a fulfilling Habitat for Humanity experience at affiliates throughout the United States and Canada. The RV Care-A-Vanners program’s goal is to further the mission of Habitat for Humanity through advocacy and by assisting local Habitat affiliates, who act as hosts, in accelerating and/or supplementing their building programs. Visit www.habitat.org/rv to learn more.

“For two weeks we worked, ate, danced and laughed together, building friendships that will last a lifetime. At the dedication party, there was hardly a dry eye, as we spent the last day celebrating with the families before we said our goodbyes. We left knowing that we had made a difference in the lives of the families, yet we each knew that we were changed ourselves—the experience had inspired us, challenged us to be better people.”

—Melissa Choo, Global Village team member

Involve youth.

Join young people putting love into action through Habitat’s youth programs, for volunteers from 5 to 25. Habitat for Humanity’s youth programs seek to capture the imagination, energy and hope of young people worldwide in order to productively and responsibly engage these future leaders in their community and as advocates for people facing poverty and homelessness.

Youth ages 5 to 15 participate in fundraising, educating others about poverty housing and homelessness, and partnering with homeowners and their children to make them feel at home in their new house. Youth ages 16 to 25 are encouraged to also do these things in addition to building a Habitat house.

You can learn more about Habitat for Humanity’s youth programs department by visiting www.habitatyouthprograms.org.

Support an Act! Speak! Build! Week
Act! Speak! Build! Week is Habitat’s international, student-initiated week of advocacy. Act! Speak! Build! Week empowers young people to educate themselves and their communities and move people to social action. Young people, ages 5 to 25, work in partnership with local affiliates to plan and host events focused on ending poverty housing. For more information, visit www.habitatyouthprograms.org/actspeakbuild.

Use Teacher and Youth Leader Resources
The department provides project plans, activity ideas and lessons to educate youth about poverty and Habitat’s mission and get them involved. These resources can be used to involve local schools or church groups, provide non-building opportunities for younger youth, spread awareness about poverty housing, and more. To get more information and view resources, visit www.habitatyouthprograms.org.

Come together with Youth United
Youth United is an affiliate-driven program, developed and supported by the Volunteer Mobilization department, in which community youth come together to completely fund and build a Habitat home. Youth ages 5 to 25 serve as the leaders, planners, fund-raisers and public relations specialists while youth ages 16 to 25 build the house on site. Affiliates can contact Youth United coordinators to discuss starting a Youth United program in their area; for more information, visit www.habitatyouthprograms.org/youthunited.
Engage your campus.

If you are attending school, you can engage your campus in Habitat’s work!

**Take on the Collegiate Challenge**

Collegiate Challenge is a year-round alternative break program that offers groups of five or more students, 16 years of age and older, the opportunity to visit one of the 250 host affiliates throughout the United States. Students spend one week working in partnership with the local affiliate, the local community and partner families to help eliminate poverty housing in the area. For more information on Collegiate Challenge or to sign up to host teams, visit www.habitatouthprograms.org/colchal.

**Join Campus Chapters**

Campus chapters are student-led, student-initiated organizations on high school or college campuses that partner with the local Habitat affiliate to advocate, educate, build and fundraise. For more information on the Campus Chapters programs, visit www.habitatouthprograms.org/campuschapters.

“**This trip has showed me a level of poverty that I did not fully realize existed in this country. At the same time, this trip has reinforced my already solid belief that just one person can greatly change the world. We saw many people who had fought for their community and had brought about real change. We met a site coordinator who had started up neighborhood revitalization and worked on over 30 houses in the past year. Then we saw the work that we were able to do, just 25 individuals from URI coming together to help the workers and more importantly to help these families.**”

—Anna White, Collegiate Challenge participant, University of Rhode Island trip to HFH of Greater Birmingham

Be a part of Women Build.

Women Build is Habitat’s volunteer program for women who want to learn construction skills and make a difference by building homes and communities. Women Build projects are regularly held by Habitat affiliates across the United States, and by Habitat organizations around the world. Women at these builds have furthered Habitat’s home-building mission by helping to construct more than 1,500 houses. To learn more, visit www.habitat.org/wb.

**Join a Women Build in your community**

For a listing of upcoming Women Builds, search Habitat’s Special Events directory. Select event type “Women Build.”

Women Build welcomes those with and without previous construction experience. There are several ways for you to be involved and all come with hands-on training. If you do not find a Women Build project near you, connect with Habitat in your community. Your local affiliate may be planning an event in the near future.
Commit long term.

If you are ready to spend several months supporting Habitat full time, there are options for you!

**Become an AmeriCorps member**
Serve a community while earning a living allowance and an educational award through AmeriCorps. The goal of the Habitat for Humanity National Service program is to help local Habitat affiliates operate more efficiently and effectively by maximizing existing volunteers, increasing capacity for new volunteers and most importantly, meeting the housing needs of communities by building more houses for low-income families. Habitat for Humanity National Service provides an opportunity for philanthropic individuals to serve local Habitat affiliates through the AmeriCorps program. AmeriCorps members are placed at local affiliates where they work to engage communities, build homes, lead volunteers and increase affiliate capacity and productivity. Visit [www.habitat.org/cnscs](http://www.habitat.org/cnscs) to learn more.

**Lend your skills through the International Volunteer Program**
Offer your talents to a Habitat area or national office during a six to 12 month volunteer term. The International Volunteer Program will engage you in the international movement for decent housing for everyone, empower you to help make a difference for Habitat for Humanity around the world, and enhance your experience with Habitat for Humanity. Visit [www.habitat.org/ivp](http://www.habitat.org/ivp) to learn more.

**Advocate.**

Habitat’s mission is not accomplished by hammers and nails alone; advocacy around housing issues is vital to expanding our impact. Visit [www.habitat.org/gov](http://www.habitat.org/gov) to learn more.

**Build Louder! online**
Be an advocate and help Habitat for Humanity change the systems that lead to poverty housing. Use your voice to help give even more families a place to call home. Visit [http://www.advocatewithhabitat.org/](http://www.advocatewithhabitat.org/) to learn more, sign up for updates about legislative updates related to housing, and find tools to help you voice your opinion.

**Organize a letter-writing campaign**
In a recent survey of congressional offices in Washington, 90 percent of offices pay “a great deal” or “quite a bit” of attention to constituent mail. Write a letter to your congressional
representative about substandard housing and Habitat for Humanity. You and your staff can help put this issue on the national agenda. Your letters do make a difference. Visit www.habitat.org/gov for information about legislative issues related to housing.

**Host a local housing situation discussion**

If you are passionate about the issue of safe, affordable housing, ask your local affiliate if they have a speaker’s bureau. Many affiliates have a group of speakers that educate schools, churches and the community in general about HFHI. This should promote discussion within the group as you provide food for thought.

**Donate.**

Habitat for Humanity partners with as many families as possible, but the problem of inadequate housing has reached critical proportions globally. Your donation helps to build affordable housing for families in need, providing them with shelter and the hope of a better life. Visit www.habitat.org/support to learn more.

**Make a one-time donation**

Habitat for Humanity provides decent, affordable houses to families in need. Habitat homeowners gain self-respect as they work alongside volunteers to construct their homes. Your contribution will help serve more families. Visit http://www.habitat.org/support.

**Become a monthly donor**

Enroll in Habitat’s Hope Builders giving program and your monthly gift will help provide Habitat with consistent, reliable support. Visit http://www.habitat.org/support/hopebuilders.aspx.

**Purchase honorary or memorial gift cards**

Make a donation in honor or memory of someone special with Gifts from the Heart gift cards. Visit http://www.habitat.org/support/giftfromtheheart.aspx.

**Double your gift through employer matching**

Your employer can multiply your gift to Habitat for Humanity with the Matching Gift program. Visit http://www.habitat.org/cd/giving/giftmatch.aspx.

**Browse the Habitat gift catalog**

Choose a gift from the online catalog which represents a donation to Habitat in honor of a loved one. Visit https://secure3.convio.net/hfhi/site/Ecommerce?store_id=1181&home=true.

**Get more information on planned giving**


“Acting as an independent entity to try to end poverty housing, Habitat for Humanity will never catch up with the need. However, when we work to advocate...the dream of ending poverty housing can become a reality.”

—Anne Randall, Sea Island
Habitat for Humanity

“After I worked with Habitat for Humanity and my local community, my life has totally changed. … My children finally have a decent place to live in. Looking at the house makes me forget all my sorrows.”

—Sita Pariyar, Habitat homeowner, Nepal

Visit www.advocatewithhabitat.org for presenter resources; go to www.habitat.org/local to contact your local affiliate.

**Recognize World Habitat Day**

The United Nations Human Settlements Programme (also know as UN-HABITAT) encourages the world to affirm that adequate shelter is a basic human right and focus on the housing conditions of cities and towns around the world on World Habitat Day, the first Monday in October each year. World Habitat Day is a valuable opportunity to remind the world of its collective responsibility for the future of the human habitat.

**Donate your car**
Cars for Homes™ can turn your car, truck, boat or RV donation into decent, affordable homes for families in need. Visit http://www.habitat.org/carsforhomes/.

**Join the Habitat Investment Program**
Earn a fixed financial return while generating real-life returns measured in homes built, families served and lives changed. Visit http://www.habitat.org/invest/.

**Become a corporate partner**
Partner with Habitat for Humanity through product donations, financial support, or mobilizing employees as Habitat volunteers. Visit http://www.habitat.org/partnerships/corporate_partnerships.aspx.

**Find your local Habitat ReStore**